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SUBJECT: KAZAKHSTAN: AMBASSADOR MEETS WITH NEW DEPUTY PA
HEAD ASHIMBAYEV

11. (SBU) Summary: New deputy head of the Presidential Administration Ashimbayev will take over Marat Tazhin's duties in coordinating policy on political issues, including democratization. Ashimbayev reacted positively to the list of suggested ideas related to the upcoming VIP visit, and promised to pursue them. The Ambassador called Ashimbayev's attention to recent legal actions against independent media outlets. End summary.

12. (U) The Ambassador met with Maulen Ashimbayev, newly appointed deputy head of the Presidential Administration, on April 18 in Astana. Ashimbayev replaced Marat Tazhin in the position on April 15, when Tazhin became Secretary of the Security Council. Ashimbayev was previously Deputy Secretary of the Security Council, and served briefly as

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Acting Secretary after Bulat Utemuratov was transferred to the Presidential Administration in late March.

13. (SBU) Ashimbayev confirmed that he will handle the same issues as Tazhin did, focusing in particular on political and democratization issues. The Ambassador said that we were glad to have a familiar contact on these issues, which were not only sensitive but very important for the bilateral relationship. One of the lessons the U.S. took from recent events in Uzbekistan, he added, was the importance of not separating democracy issues from other elements of the relationship. Although the situation in Kazakhstan is very different from Uzbekistan, progress on democratization will still take a great deal of work.

14. (SBU) The Ambassador informed Ashimbayev that during his recent visit to Astana, A/S Boucher had shared a list of possible steps that could be taken in connection with upcoming high-level visits (septel). Ashimbayev, who had not previously seen the list, reviewed it briefly and reacted favorably to the democracy-related items. He said he would discuss the idea of OSCE support for the Democratization Commission with the OSCE ambassador, and would look for ways to pursue the other ideas as well.

15. (SBU) The Ambassador also called Ashimbayev's attention to two recent cases in which the Almaty akimat, acting on the recommendation of the Almaty procuracy, had taken legal action against newspapers on the grounds that the papers' subject matter did not coincide with their registration status. (Note: The papers are Aina Plus, formerly Zhuma Times, and Alma Ata Info, formerly Nachnem c Ponedelnika.)

The U.S. saw this as an alarming precedent, as almost any paper could be found to differ at times with its specific registration category. It gave the impression that Kazakhstani authorities were waging a campaign to close independent media outlets.

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